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ABSTRACT

The Birmingham Experiment in Community Education was established to strengthen the role of the school in three disadvantaged areas of Birmingham so as to assist in the educational and social rehabilitation of the local neighborhood. The objectives of the project were (1) to foster cooperation and coordination between school staff and local voluntary agencies, (2) to foster the teachers' perception of their role in community education, (3) to improve interethnic attitudes, (4) to encourage self-generating community education, (5) to develop the educational resources of the neighborhood for the benefit of the school, (6) to develop the educational resources and facilities of the school for the benefit of the neighborhood, and (7) to improve parental childminding care for the preschool child. Interviews and observations of meetings were conducted by an evaluation team from Aston University to interpret the project's goal and raise issues connected with the project's objectives. This report of the evaluation team includes an analysis of the rationale and implementation problems for each of the project's objectives, as well as general conclusions and a discussion of problems encountered during the evaluation process. (Author/BE)

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The University of Aston in Birmingham

Department of Educational Enquiry

REPORT OF THE EVALUATION STUDY OF THE

BIRMINGHAM EXPERIMENT IN COMMUNITY EDUCATION

August 1979

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I. PREFACE

This report of a limited evaluation of the Birmingham Experiment in Community Education has been prepared for the Chief Education Officer of the City of Birmingham, the staff of the Local Education Authority, in both its administration and in the schools participating in the Experiment, the Executive Committee of the project and the Bernard Van Leer Foundation which, by grant aid, supports the Authority in the Experiment. The Report does not aim to provide any final statement, but to offer a basis for discussion and action both within the Experiment and in wider contexts.

Steve Baron (full time research officer) was a key figure within the evaluation team, latterly assisted by Olwyn Yates on a part time basis. They were supported by Mark Ginsburg and later by Henry Miller, both lecturers within the Department, and myself.

I wish to thank the various personnel participating in the project, both centrally and locally for giving our evaluation team their help and cooperation over the 18 month period to April 1979. Also I am grateful to Mr. L.C. 'Sam' Comber (HM Staff Inspector, retired), who, as Senior Research Associate in the Department, not only helped in the initial phases of our work but has also assisted me extensively in the drafting and editing of this report. Martin Vegoda (Senior Research Fellow) also gave valued comments during the closing stages of our work, but the final editorial reponsibilities have rested with me due to the dispersion of the team from April 1979.

RICHARD WHITFIELD

PROFESSOR OF EDUCATION AND HEAD OF DEPARTMENT

AUGUST 1979

2. INTRODUCTION

This is the report of the independent evaluation team on the progress of the Birmingham Experiment in Community Education. Previous reports upon the Experiment have included the HMI report of an inspection between September 1976 and March 1977 and the Report of the Bernard Van Leer Foundation Advisory Mission. The Foundation mounted this Advisory Mission to the Birmingham Experiment in March 1976 because the Experiment was felt to be in a "decisive phase". One of the main recommendations of the Mission was that "a tighter common formulation and understanding of what the project seeks to achieve" was needed. With the renewal of the Experiment for a second phase of three years from mid-1977 another set of objectives was produced as a framework for the Experiment. They appear in the Work Plan for April 1978 - August 1979, and are given below.

"AIM

The agreed aim of the project remains:-

To strengthen the role of the school in three disadvantaged areas of the city with high proportions of deprived families and imigrants (namely the areas around Birchfield Primary, Tindal Primary and Benson Junior, Infant and Nursery Schools), in order to assist in the educational and social rehabilitation of the local neighbourhood for the benefit of the children concerned, their families and the surrounding community as a totality.

OBJECTIVES

Within this overall aim the following objectives have been set:

1) To foster cooperation and coordination between staff and voluntary agencies serving the neighbourhood of the school.

2) To foster the teachers' perception of their role in community education.

3) To improve inter-ethnic attitudes.

4) To encourage self-generating community education.

5) To develop the educational resources of the neighbourhood for the benefit of the school.

6) To develop the educational resources and facilities of the school for the benefit of the neighbourhood.

7) To improve parental childminding care for the pre-school child".

This aim and these objectives provide the framework for our evaluation, and it is around them that our report is structured. Section 4 is our attempt to describe in general terms the rationale of the project as it has been expressed to us by the participants. In Section 4 we describe how far the objectives provide a tight common formulation and understanding of what the project tries to achieve.

The evaluation of educational initiatives is a relatively new intellectual field in the UK and techniques and processes relevant to it are only now emerging. The concept of evaluation with which we work is a threefold process. It consists first of collecting information to clarify the intended objectives of any initiative; next, collecting from all relevant sources information which will shed light on whether, and how, the objectives are being achieved; and lastly, interpreting and presenting that information in order to assist in decision-making at all levels. During the life of an initiative and its evaluation this process may be repeated.

Throughout the report it must be borne in mind that the evaluation was commissioned from the half-way stage of the 6 year experiment and was completed something over a year before its conclusion. Necessarily, this relatively limited in-building of evaluation activities within the Experiment has constrained their depth and scope for application. However, a number of important guidelines for the future have emerged.

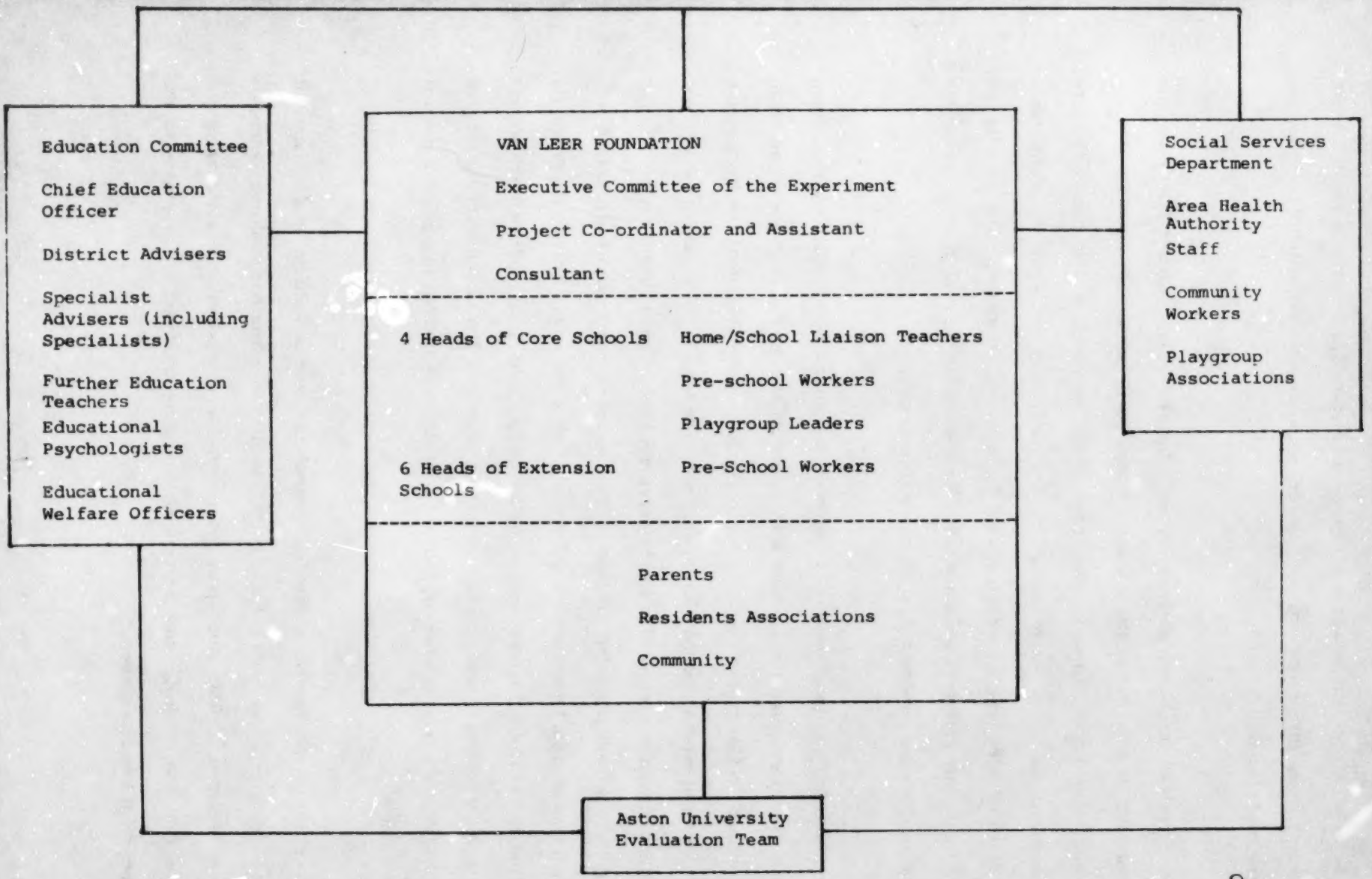
3. TEAM ACTIVITIES

During the evaluation the team attended approaching 100 meetings of all types and carried out over 200 separate interviews. Fieldnotes were compiled for each of these; only about 12 hours of meetings and interviews were tape recorded. The background of the Experiment in the first 3-year phase was charted through both interviews and written records on file. A picture of the structure of the Experiment showing the range of participants is given as Figure 1.

In response to the expressed wish of the Foundation and the Authority, unobtrusive methods have been adopted so that the evaluation might mould itself around the structure of the project and affect only minimally the behaviour of the participants. Meetings between participants of all types have been observed with occasional participation, and fieldnotes recorded. Our greatest concentration of observation has been around the meetings held by participants employed by the Education Department at both central offices and local schools. Collaborators from voluntary organizations, other Local Authority departments and the community have been observed, but to a lesser degree.

The meetings selected for observation were chosen to satisfy a variety of criteria. Formal project meetings (e.g. Headteacher meetings) were accorded high priority, as have smaller meetings arranged to initiate new activities (e.g. the meetings concerned with the setting up of Local Management Committees). Meetings at which participants were expected to talk about the long-term issues involved in their work (e.g. the role of the Home/School Liaison Teacher) have been seen as important, as have inter-agency meetings (e.g. Home/School Liaison Teacher Support Group) and meetings between staff and the members of the community (e.g. Social Committees). The extent of observation and fieldwork was, as in any research exercise, determined by the resources

Figure 1


Education Committee
Chief Education Officer
District Advisers
Specialist Advisers (including Specialists)
Further Education Teachers
Educational Psychologists
Educational Welfare Officers
VAN LEER FOUNDATION
Executive Committee of the Experiment
Project Co-ordinator and Assistant
Consultant
4 Heads of Core Schools
Home/School Liaison Teachers
Pre-school Workers
Playgroup Leaders
6 Heads of Extension Schools
Pre-School Workers
Parents
Residents Associations
Community
Social Services Department
Area Health Authority Staff
Community Workers
Playgroup Associations
Aston University Evaluation Team

available; only Mr. Baron was available on a full-time basis over a 16 month period. However, when attendance was not possible, accounts were requested later from the participants involved.

The interviews conducted were largely with the staff employed specifically for the Experiment or employed in the schools. Again, participants from voluntary organizations, other Local Authority Departments and members of the community were interviewed but to a lesser extent. The interviews ranged from unstructured "elicitation" interviews to semi-structured "issue raising" interviews. The majority fell into the former category, while the latter type were mainly used in interviewing the class teachers and non-teaching staff of the core schools.

There was initially some uncertainty between the Authority and the evaluation team about the exact role of evaluation with regard to the extension of the Birmingham Experiment in Community Education. The decision reached was that the team should look at three extension schools less intensively. The team chose to look at Ley Hill and Belfield Schools in Northfield and at Somerville School in Small Heath. It was thought that these schools presented the best combination of relevant factors (e.g. accommodation, type of area, type of school, and composition of the population) and the proximity of the two Northfield schools enables better comparisons to be made between schools through the holding of area variables reasonably constant. The curtailing of the original evaluation plans means, however, that the application of findings to particular areas is not possible.

In addition to this fieldwork, detailed research has been undertaken on the history of the Birmingham Experiment in Community Education with over one thousand documents being analyzed. This study provided a valuable contextual understanding of the project. The academic and professional literature on topics of relevance to the Experiment was also studied.

This report is primarily a piece of formative feedback rather than a terminal account on the Experiment. Accordingly, no attempt is made to paint a whole picture of the Experiment, nor to come to some final assessment of the attainment of the objectives. We see this report therefore as highlighting issues which, from our immersion in the project, seem to be important both for the remaining period of the project and for other parallel initiatives. In the raising of issues we play two not entirely separable roles. In one role we largely report upon the perceptions and attitudes of participants which have direct bearings on the future of the Experiment. In the other role we raise issues which have not been dealt with during discussion of the project but which we feel could contribute to discussion of future policy.

The Pattern of the Report

After these introductory sections the report contains four sections. Section 4 gives our basic understanding of the Birmingham Experiment in Community Education and paves the way for Section 5, in which we take each objective in turn and raise the issues connected with it. In Section 6 some conclusions derived from our work are given, while in the final section 7 there is a note about some of the difficulties experienced during our work which hopefully enables our readers to have a further important perspective on the report as a whole.

4. THE MAIN AIM OF THE BIRMINGHAM EXPERIMENT IN COMMUNITY EDUCATION

In this section, by drawing on our fieldwork we interpret the main aim of the project. By taking each portion of the aim in turn we build a model of the project as we have interpreted it from our conversations with participants when talking about their activities.

4.1. 'To strengthen the role of the school'....

From the outset the essence of the Birmingham Experiment in Community Education has rested in the distinctive use of three 'core' primary schools as centres of more broadly conceived social action. The primary school is felt to occupy a particularly advantageous position in that the age range of the pupils demands that a member of the community (usually a mother) has to come to it in order to deliver and collect the children. Schools are felt to be neutral territory without the overtones attached to other local institutions (for example, the Social Services Centres); they have, to a large extent, replaced the church as a natural focus of an area in terms of facilities and leadership. The school is seen to provide the organic centre for a community through which collective identity and action can be expressed and fostered. This communal emphasis is distinct from the traditional conception of schools as places where certain vital skills and values are taught to children. The schools are certainly expected to provide these, but they are also expected to give a broad training in social relationships and to build up favourable associations which will spread outside their walls. Within this conception it becomes necessary for teachers to extend their normal horizons to take even more account than up to now of the community, and to bring this knowledge to bear constructively in their work. The role of the Home/School Liaison Teachers in this process is vital, both as a source of information and as a stimulus to change. Their appointment stems from the belief that traditionally the different welfare agencies

have worked in isolation and this has led to a lack of effective coordination. Within the Experiment it has been a hope that schools might act as a coordinating focus for all those engaged in welfare work in the area in order that community life may be made more harmonious and efficient.

4.2. ....'In three disadvantaged areas with a high proportion of deprived families and immigrants'

The three core areas are all seen to be different but sharing to some degree the problems of disadvantage, although the meaning of this term is rarely specified. Many of the people of a disadvantaged area are thought to be deprived, but interpretations of this concept also vary widely.

Our view tends towards positing deprivation within the unequal nature of the social structure, though an alternative interpretation has been expressed to us in terms of personal or group inter-relationships. Such deprivation leads to the isolation and loneliness of individuals, and often mothers, due to the loss of a sense of community. The changes of the past decades have led to a feeling amongst the teachers that the neighbourliness and self-help of the old working class areas have disappeared and that the areas now lack cohesion. Self-confidence is thought to be low, and this leads to a dependent frame of mind and often to racial prejudice.

Another interpretation of deprivation is one pitched in terms of the development of the individual. The residents of the inner city areas are thought to be deprived of the conditions necessary for the full development of their potentialities. However, there is a wide variety of opinions as to what these conditions are. One common view is that the decaying urban environment prevents the development of a happy and well-adjusted child. More common, however, is an explanation in terms of the family life of the residents. Family structures, other than the normal nuclear family, such as one parent

families or a succession of common law relationships, are held to affect the stability of the child and to retard his mental and emotional growth.

Similarly, certain family practices are held to result in the inhibition of 'proper' development. These practices vary widely and range from over-strict child discipline to indulgence, and from failure to appreciate the need for play to children being left free to wander the streets. The fundamental issue here is seen as the quality of parenthood. Inadequate parents fail to provide the necessary basis for their own, and their children's development and fulfilment.

With reference to the term 'immigrant', we have found that it tends to be used in an omnibus fashion both within the project and outside. This sometimes misses the complexity of the situation. The term is used to include quite separate characteristics such as colour, language, culture and recency of arrival in the UK from abroad, and this leads to a paradox. On the one hand the comprehensive nature of the term tends to merge these separate characteristics into one ill-defined but potent whole. On the other hand the interplay of the factors which makes up the whole is missed. Thus action may be taken on language and culture without sufficient regard to the difficulties of colour and employment prospects.

4.3'... in order to assist the educational and social rehabilitation of the neighbourhood for the benefit of the children concerned, their families and the surrounding community as a totality.'

The school as a community institution is seen to have a crucial role in assisting the educational and social rehabilitation of the neighbourhood. It offers training in the necessary personal skills and also fosters better relationships. It thus plays a constructive part in the rebuilding of community spirit.

Before the school can do this, however, it must gain the confidence and enlist the cooperation of local residents. Central to this effort has been the emphasis on establishing a smooth continum of formal agencies through which the parent (usually mother) and the new born child may be contacted and brought into a mother and toddler club, from which they may progress through playgroup and nursery into the reception class of the infant and junior school. The hopes of those working in the project are to establish friendly relationships early and to begin the training of the child before entry to formal schooling. Misunderstanding on the part of many residents about what education involves, and fear of the school and its activities, may thus be allayed early. In this way not only may the child most easily adapt to, and gain more from school, but the mother will be enabled to participate in the activities provided. Self-help groups either with a specific focus (e.g. dressmaking) or with a general purpose, can provide some of the elements such as companionship, therapy, and confidence in inter-personal situations, now thought to be largely missing from these areas.

On a more individual basis the school is seen to provide, through its specialist personnel, direct advice and referrals to other agencies. This may range from direct counselling on personal issues, specific advice and training on parenting skills, to court action in a case of non-attendance. For newcomers every opportunity is to be taken to introduce them to the patterns of everyday life, while multicultural events are to be held to demonstrate reciprocity.

It is largely through the process of improving personal and group skills that the social regeneration of the inner city is thought to be encouraged. In the short term adults will be helped to progress so that they can cope better with their lives, while in the long term, inner city children will be more competent, so that the believed implicit cycle of disadvantage will be broken. It is believed that the cumulative effect of this action on the lives of individuals will eventually be translated into the growth of a more confident and buoyant community.

5. THE OBJECTIVES AND CONTROL OF THE BIRMINGHAM EXPERIMENT IN COMMUNITY EDUCATION

Having outlined in Section 4 our understanding of how the participants perceive the aim of the Experiment, we now turn to a major discussion of objectives. In sections 5.1 to 5.3 we consider some issues related to the understanding of the objectives both by the participants and ourselves as evaluators. We discuss the origins of the objectives before turning to wider questions raised about the control of the experiment. This theme leads us to analyse in Section 5.4 the objective of fostering cooperation and coordination between staff and voluntary agencies (Objective 1). We look at the divergences of purpose between sets of participants, both central and local, both inside and outside the project, and point to some of the consequences or potential consequences of the divergences. In particular, we note the appearance within the Experiment of some of the wider debates which are occurring in education and some of the possible difficulties in the relationship between the project and voluntary organisations.

In Section 5.5 we investigate the position of the class teachers in the Experiment (Objective 2) and then we discuss the role of the Home/School Liaison Teacher and its recent definition as an example of some of the processes of the project. Throughout we note the one-way flow of role definition. In Section 5.6 we explore some of the issues raised by the objective of improving inter-ethnic attitudes (Objective 3). We argue that the problems of racism are more complex than 'attitudes' would suggest, and indicate some of these complexities.

The obscurity of the objective of encouraging self-generating community education (Objective 4) is noted in Section 5.7, while the setting up of Local Management Committees is taken as a crucial indication of some principles underlying the development of the Project. In Section 5.8 we discuss the two objectives aiming at the mutual development and use of educational resources by school and community

(objectives 5 and 6). We reflect on the impact of the Experiment in the classroom and raise the problem of the relationship between the school cultures and those of the areas. The problem is illustrated by our discussion in Section 5.9 of the attempt to improve parental childmining care.

Throughout we have endeavoured to be objective and constructive but we are conscious that by concentrating upon aspects of the Project in which we have detected weaknesses, which if corrected might allow more rapid progress to be made, we may give the impression that we have not fully appreciated the sterling work that has been done. This is not so; we have been impressed by much of what we have seen and hope that in due course it will receive the recognition it deserves.

5.1 'Within this overall aim the following objectives have been set...'

Before examining/discussing each objective in turn, we first consider some of the problems that we, as evaluators, have in dealing with the objectives as a whole. Through our practical experience in the field, we find ourselves face-to-face with two crucial aspects of the Project;

(i) Is there sufficient publicly formulated and accepted purpose to the Project?

(ii) Is the control of the Experiment above officer level clearly enough defined to afford a proper basis for accountability?

It has been natural for the evaluators to turn first to the objectives that have been formulated in order to assess, during the period of the evaluation, the extent to which they are being reached. While it is convenient to have a set of formal objectives by which the genereal intentions of the project can be understood, the restriction of the evaluation to the assessment of the practice of these alone would miss many of the essential aspects of the Experiment, since only rarely can the practice of human

activities be enshrined completely within a list of intentions. By taking the objectives solely at their face value as a shared set of ideas which initiate and guide action the researcher can miss questions which are empirically forceful. The evaluator needs as well to explore the underlying premises on which the objectives are based.

5.2 Sharing and understanding of, and guidance from, objectives

While the process of formulation of the revised set of objectives was not observed by the evaluation team, we understand that they were produced jointly by the administration team and the Headteachers. While it is recognised that the broad lines of policy must be laid down at an early stage in a project, there is a risk that the advantages of securing the spontaneous involvement of project staff and members of the community might be lost. Our discussions with class teachers, for example, have revealed a sense of distance between their day-to-day work in the school and the formal objectives of the Project. Similarly our contacts with the local community would not suggest that the objectives, as formulated, have provided the focus for many of the spontaneous community activities that have emerged.

It is always difficult for professionals in such complex situations to understand the outlook and aspirations of the local residents and to react suitably as enablers. Our feeling is that considerable benefits would result from making the objectives, as a basis for cooperative action, more widely known, and encouraging greater dialogue as a consequence.

If the objectives are to be taken as the common formulation and understanding of the Project, then all the participants should have both a knowledge and a working understanding of them. Participants have extreme difficulty in relating particular activities to particular objectives.

An example will help to make this point clearer. During a consultation a member of the evaluation team joined a discussion between two senior teachers and a member of the administrative team on how self-generating community education (Objective 4) could be achieved in one school. The resulting quarter of an hour revealed that nobody had a clear idea of the meaning of the objective, nor how the activities specified would help attain it. This does not mean that the discussion was fruitless, but suggests that more time spent on clarifying the fundamental purposes of the Project with the participants would prove valuable.

A major exception to this finding is in connection with the objective aimed at improving parental childminding care for the pre-school child (Objective 7), where we have found an understanding of both the objective and its implications. Although action in different directions is being taken in the Project, particularly in the provision of pre-school activities, we feel, as do many of the participants, that there is a lack of coherence in the action. Activities are given as priorities but they are not seen by workers in the field as being set in any systematic framework. There is felt a need in the schools for a more clearly articulated and dissemminated philosophy within the project.

5.3 Objectives, accountability and control

Besides initiating and guiding action, objectives provide the target against which the effectiveness of the action, when it has been taken, can be judged. Objectives, therefore, form part of any accounting system. In the Birmingham Experiment in Community Education we have found that workers in the field are not clear about where control of the Project lies, nor about the respective functions of the Bernard Van Leer Foundation, the Education Committee and the Executive Committee. Many of the workers too are not satisfied that the activities they carry out are accurately reported, and so fear that the accounting system is not working properly. In our opinion the

Project would benefit all round if the roles of the Foundation and the two Committees were more clearly and generally understood.

The Advisory Mission and subsequent visits by representatives of the Foundation, for example, have not helped; the Foundation has appeared to the participants not so much a partner in a challenging enterprise but more as a remote provider of funds. On the other hand the Foundation is felt by the administration team to have been unhappy with the nature and extent of the reporting they had received on the project during its first phase. This has resulted in considerable pressure being experienced by the team to put a strong framework of reporting onto the project. This tightening up of the accounting seems to have been well received, but it has done nothing to allay the concern about the accuracy of the reporting.

There is evidence of some tensions at the administrative level. There seems to be a significant split between the two major contact points with the schools, namely the Coordinator and the Inspectorate, who are perceived to be making different and often contradictory demands. The Inspectorate were not fully included in the planning of the project and they still seem to have some serious doubts about its viability. The Coordinator is naturally committed to the project and this has resulted in apparently irreconcilable demands being made on school staff, especially Heads. The Inspectorate quite rightly demand attention to standards within the schools, while the Experiment demands involvement in the community. In the present situation with limited resources, especially time, these demands may be irreconcilable, but given goodwill, the opportunity presented by falling rolls, and the greater availability of trained personnel, these demands could both be met.

In the longer term, in order to avoid duplication and possible conflict, the relationship between the primary schools in community education and the services provided by the Adult and Youth and Community Sections needs to be rationalised. With respect to the

relationships between the Education Department and the other local authority departments and outside agencies, there appears to be some tension in the 'disputed' area of pre-school provision in which the Education Department, the Area Health Authority and the Social Services Department all have an interest. The situation here is complex, but we became aware of some interdepartmental friction, from which the modus vivendi that emerged has enabled the generally good field officer relationships to continue and the Education Department to expand its activity, though perhaps somewhat at the expense of the Social Services Department. Looking to the future again, there may be a need for a high level policy discussion to define responsibilities in relation to the pre-school child; this would accord with central government guidance.

The relationship between the central office of the Education Department and the schools involved in the Experiment is of key importance. This is an extremely sensitive area for us to discuss, but its implications are crucial both for the Experiment and for future activities on a wider scale. From one perspective central office represents the management/employers while the school represents the employees. The Authority as an employer is sometimes seen to be attempting a redefinition of the role of the teacher within the schools in that commitments are being defined in a broader and more flexible way than hitherto. The teachers, as individuals within the Experiment, have generally not had the chance to choose whether they teach in a community school or not, owing to the way in which the Project was set up and to the appointment of most new teachers from the pool. Traditionally many teachers have been generous in the time they have given to out-of-school activities. The Experiment makes new and onerous demands on teachers, which, in operation, are not of an entirely voluntary nature as pressures are sometimes put on them which they find hard to resist. With cuts in the education budget the effects of this are felt in very real terms of staff and material resources, particularly in community schools where obligations for a more imaginative and creative use of resources are greater.

The positions of the pre-school and non-teaching staffs are similar. The large extent of this generously given service is indisputable but the degree to which it can be relied upon in the future is less certain. The Birmingham Experiment in Community Education has not hitherto worked closely with the professional Associations (both teacher and non-teacher), but, as pointed out above, some of the activities of the Experiment carry implications related to conditions of service that should be discussed with the Associations, which have been shown to be supportive and innovative in the past. The Associations are currently concerned about both the education cuts and the voluntary nature of out-of-school activities, while the Experiment is, we have noted, putting pressure upon individual teachers and non-teaching staff to see their commitments in much more extensive terms than previously. If the Experiment is to provide policy models for the future, consultations with the Associations and with the teachers involved would seem to be vital.

Moving away from the contractual type relationship between the central office and the school to more organisational and educational issues we find similar problems. The basis upon which the Experiment seems to work is predominantly one of prescribed innovation from the centre. This statement does not, however, contradict our earlier view concerning the lack of overall philosophy and of the detached nature of the objectives from what is already happening in schools. We have not wished to suggest that a lack of philosophy does not mean that real interventions are not made. They can be and are. What is felt to be lacking is a publicly discussed and accepted coherence in the action. Furthermore, the gap between the objectives and activity in the localities does not mean that effects from the centre are not felt in the localities. Our evidence would suggest that they are. What we are now questioning is whether this essentially one-way flow of innovative ideas is making the best use of all the experience and creative energy that is available. We once more argue for increased dialogue at all levels of the Project and suggest that no one particular group has all the answers to questions relating to inner city community education.

The issue of the control of schools in one being worked through in a wider context than the Birmingham Experiment. One position taken on this question seems to hold that the schools are too autonomous, with the traditional controls of advice, career prospects, selective information and employer's instructions failing to work adequately. Opposed to this position is one which holds that the autonomy of the school is vital to its success and that this autonomy is under increasing attack and must be defended. In this context the major question within the Experiment, as we have previously noted, seems to be about the role of the administrative team: are they 'super heads', closely involved inspectors, or do they simply have a supporting function? At present this debate seems unproductive, but the urgent need for a solution remains. Two possibilities would seem to offer themselves; the matter could be settled by an authoritative definition, or by the development of a philosophy to which all could subscribe wholeheartedly. We hold that the second position is likely to be more fruitful.

5.4. 'To foster cooperation and co-ordination between staff and voluntary agencies serving the neighbourhood of the school' (Objective 1)

Contacts with voluntary agencies at field level abound and provide one of the major growth points of the project. Two questions arise, however, about the relationship between voluntary agencies and the Experiment. Both are based on only a few instances that have come to our notice but they seem to be vital. Firstly, with which agencies should the Experiment cooperate? This raises two supplementary questions. Should all organisations within the area be seen as expressions of community re-organisation and regeneration, and therefore of potential value, or are certain organisations unacceptable - and if so, how are the criteria of unacceptability to be determined? Secondly, upon which issues and to what ends should staff cooperate with local voluntary organisations? The weakness we sense here is that by leaving decisions about cooperation and coordination entirely to the professional staff, opportunities for enlisting and developing other valuable assets might be missed.

It is in this nexus of cooperation with other agencies that differences in the interpretation of the role of the Home/School Liaison Teacher as an essentially school-based educational worker, on the one hand, or as an attached community worker, on the other, come to be surface. One argument is that the Home/School Liaison Teacher is a teacher and does not have the necessary skills to become involved in community work; the focus of her activity should therefore be strictly educational, focusing on pupils, parents and adult education as a means of community regeneration. The other is that the school, as a focal point of the area, can act as a coordinator of the diverse groups. An educational focus is not enough as many of the problems do not lie within the domain of education. It is therefore necessary, while being based on a school, for the Home/School Liaison Teacher to be involved with wider issues. We return to this question in the next section.

5.5. 'To foster the teachers' perception of their role in community education' (Objective 2)

We have already noted two of the factors relevant to this objective, namely the greater involvement in community education expected from the teachers and the detachment teachers feel from the objectives. It is clear that the role of the class teacher in community education and the ways in which it can be fostered present a complex and formidable problem.

So far the Experiment is reported to us by teachers as having made little impact upon the classroom, but this may be a measure of the intractability of the problem. Many of the teachers participate in voluntary activities but see little return for their efforts. In some situations the impact of the Experiment has even tended to be negative in that teachers' morale has suffered. There are many reasons given for this, the main ones being the perceived devaluing of normal teaching in certain circumstances, the disruption of the normal school activities, the freedom and apparently advantageous

conditions of Home/School Liaison Teacher employment, and the lack of involvement of the class teachers in the running of the Project.

The role of the Home/School Liaison Teacher has become a major topic of interest within the Experiment. For the Home/School Liaison Teacher there is, in spite of the apparent advantages, an element of career risk. These teachers feel that it is difficult to gain promotion as they do not have a classroom, which is a vital display arena, as a step to deputy headship. They are being asked to develop work which is bound to be somewhat controversial, though this may be an asset rather than a disadvantage.

In spite of efforts to clarify the duties and responsibilities of the Home/School Liaison Teachers, and some changes in the organisation affecting their work, there is still some confusion amongst the various groups of workers in the field about their respective roles which is hampering the progress of the Project.

5.6. 'To improve inter-ethnic attitudes' (Objective 3)

Within this vital area we would like to raise two issues. The first is concerned with whether the problem is one of 'attitude' as usually interpreted. The second is to do with the effects of the activities perceived as beneficial.

To formulate the problem of racism, with which this objective is mainly concerned, in terms of attitude, as the Birmingham Experiment in Community Education does, tends to direct attention away from more widespread social trends. To approach the problem from a perspective of changing attitudes locates it firmly within the mental make-up of the inhabitants of the inner city, whereas it is better viewed in a wider social context. Whilst attitudes can be changed by specific action, the process occurs best when it is founded upon an understanding and acceptance of cultural differences.

It follows that activities intended to improve racial relationships should lead to an understanding, as well as an acceptance, of cultural differences as evolutionary responses to different environmental influences, which can increase and enrich the variety of human experience. This, however, is not easy to achieve since it requires intellectual effort and a willingness to examine one's own ideas of normality. We have evidence that simple mixing and a sharing in joint activities, valuable as these may be as a beginning, do not, in themselves, lead to improved relationships. Something more is required, and it may take a long time to achieve. This is clearly an area in which experiment is essential and to which research should be directed.

5.7. 'To encourage self-generating community education' (Objective 4)

A major activity related to this objective was the proposal to set up Local Management Committees. Three closely related topics within the process are now highlighted.

Firstly, attention has been given almost exclusively to the structure and constitution of such bodies. This is an important issue, but the way in which the Committees are to be set up may be even more important. We find that the process has been formulated from an administrative perspective after some consultations with individual Heads about the extent of power to be given to these Committees. This is another example of innovation from the top downwards. We also wonder why Local Management Committees have been given such priority? Are they intended to express some community voice? If so, the way in which they were to be set up might have involved more consultation with the people in the area.

Secondly, we have reservations about the Local Management Committee proposals in that guarantees have been given that only the 'right people' would be appointed to the Committees. We are unaware of the precise qualifications for being a 'right person' but it would seem that the two major groups who qualify are the professionals involved

in the area and certain 'acceptable' members of the community. Members of specific community groups, for example, the National Front and the Claimants Union, and some specific individuals, are thought not to be suitable to serve on Committees. How the members of the Committees will be selected has not been specified in detail. It may be that initially some administrative control over membership should be exercised, but eventually, surely, the aim must be for the community to determine its own representatives.

The third aspect of the setting up of Local Management Committees lies in the question of what powers should be given to them. There are two crucial issues here: firstly, the distinction between an advisory and an executive function, and secondly, the distinction between statutory and non-statutory provision in the schools. Opinion seems to reject purely advisory functions, and favours the Committee also having an executive function. We accept this; the sticking point lies with the second issue. The majority of opinions of central administrators and the Heads seems to be that to give a Local Management Committee an executive function within the statutory area would be undesirable and impossible, perhaps legally, but certainly politically. They agree that the Local Management Committee must be given real power, but only in the non-statutory area. Here again the best policy might be to proceed with caution and by short steps.

5.8. 'To develop the educational resources of the neighbourhood for the benefit of the school. To develop the educational resources and facilities of the school for the benefit of the neighbourhood' (Objectives 5 and 6)

At present the educational resources of the neighbourhood seem undervalued and the educational resources and facilities of the school seem overvalued.

Turning to the first aspect, the development of the educational resources of the neighbourhood, we find that the effect of the Project upon the use of these in routine learning activities of the school has been disappointing. This may be due more to the difficulty of effecting any curriculum change than a failure to recognise the value of local resources. Usually some well-established ingredient of the curriculum has to be dislodged before room can be found for something new and untried. At present the curricular impact of the Birmingham Experiment seems either to have been to encourage the introduction of discrete topics for project work, for example, litter, the physical environment, the economic history of the area and other cultures, or to have provided extra pairs of hands for routine work, (for example, remedial teaching). But this is a start and given goodwill all round the process could gather momentum. The tradition of Christian assembly has been challenged quite fundamentally by multi-faith or broadly humanistic alternatives. This is a pointer in the same direction, though here, as always, steady advance is preferable to hasty or insufficiently considered action.

Local residents have been involved in the schools and the classrooms, but more in the role of non-teaching help or substitute teachers of specific manual skills, such as needlework, rather than as bearers of knowledge which is valid and of particular relevance to schooling in the inner city. The question of the whole curriculum of an inner city school as being distinct from that of any primary school is a relatively new one, and it is not surprising that it has been approached hesitantly. Individual developments are each important, but the Birmingham Experiment aims towards a more inclusive totality of schools and community, and that must be a spur to further progress.

With regard to the second aspect,there can be no doubt that the schools have resources which are of value to the neighbourhoods, but the new local circumstances require that their present uses need to be re-examined critically to ensure that they are used to their best effect.

The fact that attendance at school is legally enforceable, and that maintaining discipline necessitates certain social relationships and imposes certain constraints, makes the full use of all the local resources of an inner city area difficult to achieve. Important in this context is the extent to which views of what constitutes good behaviour, good social relationships, the proper upbringing of children, and the future of the inner city and the family are shared by teachers and the community. If they are not shared, where does the divergence lie and how does it originate? Too often parent and pupil culture appear to the teachers only as the barriers to be broken down rather than as something that may contain a valuable resource uniquely tied to, and formative of, the inner city resident. This problem is perhaps best illustrated by the analysis of the strongest and most coherent thrust of the Birmingham Experiment, objective 7.

5.9. 'To improve parental childminding care of the pre-school child' (Objective 7)

It is widely felt by professionals within the Project that many of the parents and childminders whom they meet are not rearing their children 'properly'. This lack of a good start is held to be largely responsible for the child being underdeveloped on arrival at school, and for his never catching up in terms of conventional educational performance. Inner city children are thus thought likely to fail in the educational system, and consequently take poorly paid jobs and continue to live in the inner city. This view, in some form or other, is held by many professionals in the Experiment and has considerable academic research backing.

Child rearing is seen as the point where the cycles of disadvantage can best be broken. To this end playgroups, mothergroups and home visiting have been organised. The latter aim at both instructing in the home and bringing the child into groups, which provide a more intensive and direct intervention. The crucial activity which the Experiment aims to transform is that of play. Asian children are often thought to be too bookish and not to have had the opportunity to develop properly through play, while other

children often are thought to be generally under-stimulated and consequently under-developed. Even if play does occur it is likely to be non-educational or destructive play. The Experiment tries to combat ignorance of childrearing practices by teaching some relevant parenting skills.

The values attached to school-based views and to the conceptions of the local residents with respect to childrearing are starkly contrasted. The childrearing practices used in school are felt to be correct, while many of those of the parents are felt to be incorrect. We want to suggest that given the historical and cultural variations in conceptions of childhood that exist, the apparent ignorance of parents may merely reflect a difference of approach to childrearing. If this is true, and research on this is still very preliminary, then a very different light is cast upon this objective. Home visiting and many of the educational processes, could, with the best of intentions, be a systematic attack on the cultures of the area. By assuming that the educational knowledge of the schools is universally valid, the Experiment, in the hope of helping the regeneration of the areas may be in fact damaging to the existing cultures. If there is to be a dialogue between the school and the community, as the Experiment aims, then either some powerful reasons have to be found as to why the culture of the school has a priority over those of the local communities, or some of the ideas of parental ignorance and inadequacy need fundamental reassessment. Sensitive professional intervention in and support of communities requires insights of the kind provided by social anthropologists if it is to be fruitful in the long term.

6. CONCLUSIONS

We do not propose to restate our findings here. However, underlying these findings, there seem to be three key processes to which we now briefly draw attention as a basis for discussion and action for the benefit of Experiment and the communities it serves.

We are impressed by the faith which the vast majority of participants have in the local authority services. A guiding theme of many of the activities of the Experiment is that inner city problems can be alleviated if the provision of various services is made more efficient. In the core schools this leads to attempts to establish a smooth continuum of contact from birth to eleven years, while with regard to other statutory agencies, cooperation and coordination are seen to be the way forward. This is not to deny the deeply held feelings of some participants that changes need to be made, but if the Project has one fundamental article of faith, it is that existing school provision is, to a greater or lesser degree, the basis for a solution to many of the problems. We do not doubt the actual and potential value of education and of school, but some of the assumtions made, for example, about the inadequacy of parents and their childrearing practices, could be ill-founded and thus damaging to the attempt to create genuine cooperation with local residents.

The second major feature which we want to emphasize is the explanation of events, whether at the centre or periphery, in terms of the mental make up of individuals rather than the social and political structure in which they find themselves. Tensions and problems which participants experience about the Experiment are often attributed to the personality and intentions of other participants. The action of much of the Experiment is based upon a notion of the inadequate mental constitution of the local residents. Here we would like to point to our analyses of the objectives concerned with improving inter-ethnic attitudes and improving childrearing practices. The assumption within the Experiment of the inadequacy of the inner city resident may rest on a

misrecognition of cultural difference as inadequacy, partly because of the assumed universal validity of the existing dominant school culture; difference is not the same as deficit.

The problems of the inner city have an existence over and above the individual mind, and the latter is significantly conditioned by the total environment. Just as we argued that racism is not only an 'attitude', so we would argue that the decay of the inner city is not fundamentally a problem of individual psychological make-up. Processes, which are independent of the inner city residents, play a vital part in generating the problems of the inner areas. The decline of industry, low wages, poor housing, falling community income, and so on, have all had a part in the social degeneration of the inner areas. In addition to providing valuable therapy and help for individuals, the Experiment, if it is to play a part in the social as well as the educational regeneration of the areas, could fruitfully pay more attention to its role in relation to these wider structural processes.

The third important process within the project to which we draw attention is that of communication. At present communication patterns within the project do not seem to generate dialogue. This appears at many different levels within the Experiment and has important ramifications. We have already noted the various gaps and tensions that have emerged due to difficulties of communication and ambiguities of control both within the Local Authority and the Education Department, and between the central office of the Education Department and the schools. Similarly we have noted related tensions within the schools. Given the aim of the Project, communication between the professionals and the local residents is crucial. It is in this area that we feel misunderstandings may occur which could impede the achievement of the aim of the Project by alienating the community from the school and the statutory agencies in general.

If the concept of training can be taken out of the one-way flow model of the 'lecture' by the 'expert' to the 'lay' person and turned into a dialogue of different but interested parties, then some shared philosophy could emerge. This could be closely tied to the cultures of the areas, and could harness the considerable human and material resources of the Experiment. To start defining the questions of community education in dialogue with all parties and to attempt to find answers could provide the innovative model to which the Experiment aspires.

7. A RESTROSPECTIVE NOTE ON EVALUATION PROBLEMS

The BECE's aim of alleviating the disadvantageous social conditions in the three selected 'main' areas of the city provided a powerful motivation for the involvement of the evaluation team. However, our disinclination to accept definition of the Experiment from the central administration as the only operative one caused us several problems including the eventual premature but negotiated termination of our study.

Differences in meaning among all participants were, to us, both interesting and important, particularly since this was an experiment in community education. Yet listening to all participants equally was a fundamental challenge to the organised structure of the Experiment. Having entered into a pre-existing field at about the half-way stage and seeing fairly swiftly significant divergencies of interpretation and practice, we were faced with the choice of either acknowledging these, or denying their existence in favour of the on the surface coherent view of the centre. That choice could not be avoided, and whatever decision we made was bound to be viewed critically among some of the significant participants.

We opted for a 'democratic' data gathering strategy, using chiefly anthropological methods; ethical reasons played no small part in this since participants at all levels were allowing us the privilege of entering into their professional and personal worlds. The most likely alternative evaluation strategy which we seriously considered and rejected, would have been to operationalise the varying objectives outlined in the public and internal documents of the Experiment and to measure movement towards these. This strategy would have been carried out by a series of tests and measurements in which individual cognitive, attitudinal and behavioural performance of urban residents would have been assessed, as would some of their group behaviour. Similarly, grass-roots professionals would have been assessed for changes in attitude and behaviour. An intractable problem here was however that some of the objectives, as we have

mentioned, defied definition by their originators, let alone any operationalisation of them by the evaluation team. Furthermore our late entry into the Experiment militated against before and after or control group studies, and in any case our resources would have been quite inadequate for this kind of work to have been thoroughly executed.

These two alternative evaluation approaches differ fundamentally with regard to the way in which a focus on what are officially characterised as social problems are linked to the working classess and ethnic minorities. Our approach included attention to structural features of the society and its apparatuses, and to the consequent collective situation of the subjects of the Experiment, while an alternative approach might have tended to look primarily to the individual abilities, characteristics and performance of the subjects and to their group summation. From our perspective much of the action appeared, at one level to ignore the structural formation of social problems, yet at another level through this very blindness and the consequent nature of the action taken, the Experiment seemed to be helping more to maintain than to revitalise the social positions of the subjects. Far from alleviating the situation, the Experiment may be unintentionally helping to reiterate it. In our analysis, the action implicitly predicated on the notion of the pathology of individuals did not help improve the relatively powerless position of its subjects. In fact, it tended to increase their powerlessness through a possibly simplistic missionary zeal to transform local cultures and habits. Our analysis, in part, challenges the validity of the implicit cultural pathology model, and argues that this model was in fact a part of the problem rather than a part of the solution.

Further difficulties arose for the team because rather than taking the LEA as a neutral body with transparent purposes, we have looked upon it as an organ of social power whose action needs much decoding if real understanding of the Experiment is to be gained. We were concerned about the relationship between central agency professionals,

grass-roots professionals and their clients in terms of power and the consequences of power rather than in terms of the medical model of the expert diagnosis, prescription and treatment of deficient patients. We charted the power basis of the organisation and pointed to the not abnormal and structural nature of the conflicts in the Experiment. An alternative evaluation approach would have been to address the policy questions defined by the central administrators of the Experiment, with their nature being viewed as unproblematic. The conflicts within the Experiment would, likely as not, have appeared in such an analysis since they were unmistakeable, but we suspect more as reducible firctions caused by individuals than as the long-run structural features which we have underlined. Our approach was thus a challenge to the orthodoxy that the hierarchy was based on unequivocal expertise and experience and that the understandings and purposes between different professionals and between professionals and clients were all shared, which they were not. The concept of an 'experiment' does in any case, imply trial, uncertainty and speculation rather than clarified and sure expertise.

We could not avoid raising questions about the nature of local political decision-making and policy implementation, as well as about the nature of interventionist policies. Our feel for the issues was not fundamentally one of social engineering by policy implementation, but more towards a vew of community regeneration based on grass-roots organisation and definitions of issues. After all the intervention was, according to the central administration, fundamentally aimed at regeneration of the communities by the communities, with all the problems of ascertaining 'What constitutes a community', and we took that position at its face value.

Our research strategy is probably best characterised as one whereby each participant is taken seriously in an attempt to understand his or her viewpoint without losing our 'external' standpoint. The result of this was an attempt to establish a dialogue between the various participants and the research team, which was, with few exceptions,

successful. The likely alternative strategy would, while establishing a friendly rapport with subjects, have implicitly or explicitly imposed our or the central administration's specific meanings onto the majority of the participants. The differences in these two approaches with respect to the power relationships within the Experiment are clear. One accepts the overriding importance of all the definitions, but takes a critical stance towards them all. Taking all participants seriously, and denying privilege to any one group, leads to differences in research practice, and possibly to a spin-off effect. For the researcher to act democratically and confidentially towards each participant in an otherwise relatively autocratic situation, can be a living challenge to that autocratic situation by way of example and ethic.

The following extracts from the report of the March 1979 seminar on "Parent and Community Involvement in Early Childhood Education" organised by the Van Leer Foundation in Cali, but which none of us in Birmingham attended, are very relevant as we look back upon our experience:

> 'the notion of genuine and mutual interaction between school and community ... will be a difficulty and possibly lengthy task. One thing is sure. Only genuine involvement is good enough. In deprived communities especially there has been a tendency for superficial observance of the notion ... providing an illusion of participation but creating the alternative reality. This offers some semblance of participation without any responsibility for real decision making'.

> 'The decisive test of a functioning community is its ability to facilitate the development of those persons who comprise it.'

> 'The problem, which seems in some ways insolvable, appears to be that there is a widespread pattern of institutionalisation and bureaucracy which tends to produce rigidity in an area which above others needs maximum flexibility. In built administrative attitudes, systems of control and the ways in which operational decisions are made, all of which may be more or less suitable to established and experienced organizations, are inimical to the challenge implicit in innovation. A related but different problem is that projects working in marginal communities are inevitably faced with populations which are frequently somewhat suspicious of activities identified with the established authorities. This adds a special degree of difficulty to the problem of the "system" itself seeking to promote or carry out innovation.'

'Both the resistances of local groups to the intervention of bureaucracy and the resistance of bureaucracies to change are parts of the same syndrome. Success seems likely to come by implicating and involving them actively in the process of planning and controlling change.'

(Van Leer Foundation, The Hague, May 1979)

Finally, the nub of the problem for our evaluation strategy is crystallised precisely in paragraph 72 of this seminar report.

'The problem of the discordance between the attitudes and goals of the authorities when facing the problem of depressed communities relates also to possibilities discussed for alternatives in the area of evaluation. It was questioned whether a looser, "illuminative" approach could widely be adopted given that the established authorities are for the most part wedded to the sometimes deceptive clarities of the traditional model, if indeed they are interested in the problem at all.'

In the light of these extracts of the record of the deliberations of a wide range of experienced scholars, administrators and practitioners, we believe that the bulk of our report is by no means far from the mark. Furthermore it has seemed important for this reflective tailpiece to be included here, since it both enables the nature of the evaluative evidence of various kinds to be appreciated, and illuminates the dilemmas faced by the research team and by the central staff of the authority. The permeability of the authority towards new and more open perspectives in the management of community education must inevitiably be tested in the discussion and dissemination of this account. In our view however, the long term committment of fieldworkers and volunteers, upon which local endeavours depend, now requires less obviously closed and ambiguous structures.

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